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ABSTRACT

As the population of ethnic groups rises through immigration in the United States and other developed countries, multicultural education, defined as the study of minorities, provides schoolchildren with the social, cultural, and political background of these groups. To stress the impact of these populations and the need for such studies, brief descriptions are included of the minority groups in China (Tibetans and Hui Muslims); England (East Indians, Pakistanis, Africans, and West Indians); Israel (Sephardic Jews, Israeli Arabs, Palestinian Arabs); the United States (Native Americans, Hawaiians, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian Americans); and the USSR (Ukranians, Belorussians, Tatars, Americans, and Georgians). (DJC)

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INTERNATIONALIZING MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

BY

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Internationalizing Multicultural Education

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Value of Multicultural Study

Multicultural education, defined as the study of minorities, began as immigration studies. Black Studies rose from concerns following the 1960s U.S. Black-white race conflict. Multicultural education, most agree, promotes national harmony and equality by teaching awareness of the history, socioeconomic-political background, problems, and contributions of all ethnic groups, noting how each enriches the mosaic of a national culture. Most scholars now prefer to use the terms "cultural pluralism" or "mosaic" (valuing racial, religious, and linguistic differences) instead of the now-believed erroneous "melting pot" concept (assimilating ethnic groups into one national identity).

A chief concern has been the majority-minority language problem. Bilingualists want to enrich the home language during the student's early years while also teaching the essential national language, such as English. Majority language advocates prefer total immersion in the majority language to the exclusion of the home language. The debate continues. (1)

World migration since World War II has changed the socio-economic and political landscape of the U.S. and many other countries. A brief profile of major U.S. ethnic groups below is followed by short descriptions of ethnic groups and problems in selected countries. The conclusion explores the values to be gained from studying multicultural education in international perspective.

Migratory Shift Affects Multicultural Education

Recent migratory shifts have changed the ethnic texture of nations, including the U.S. Increased immigration has come from former colonies, other third world countries, and war-torn countries to England, France, The Netherlands, and elsewhere. Poorer Southern and Eastern Europeans have migrated for jobs and upward mobility to West Germany and Sweden. Canada and Australia have absorbed many immigrants. The U.S., like other nations, has become more ethnically, culturally, and racially diverse. While most immigrants to the U.S. before 1965 came from Europe, recent arrivals are from Latin America and Asia. New immigrants are changing America socially, politically, educationally, and culturally.

U.S. Multicultural Education Has Become Crucial

U.S. minorities are increasing faster than the majority. While the white population increased 6% between 1970-80, Asian-Americans increased 141%, Mexican Americans 93%, and Black Americans 18%. Ethnic minorities are now the majorities in 25 large U.S. cities. By 2000 AD they will dominate 50 major cities and will constitute 42% of all public school children. The new ethnic mix needs to be understood. Multicultural education needs to increase. (2)

The majority-minority gap is growing in education, jobs, income, health, and longevity. In 1986, 31.1% of U.S. Blacks and 27.3% of Hispanics lived in poverty; Blacks were twice as likely as whites to be unemployed. "If we allow these disparities to continue," one report said, "the United States inevitably will suffer a compromised quality of life and a lower standard of living....We will [be] unable to fulfill the promise of the American dream." (3)

Brief Portrait of U.S. Minorities

American Indians (Native Americans)

Among the poorest and least educated of U.S. ethnic groups, American Indians numbered over one million in 1980 and are increasing. Their land treaty rights and special relationships with the federal government give them more legal power than other ethnic groups. Exercising these legal rights has evoked hostility from some of the affected majority. A chief problem of the strongly tribal American Indians, especially those living on reservations, is to marshall their legal claims and land resources in ways that help them attain full citizenship. (4)

Hawaiians

Pure Hawaiians, 1% of the people of the 50th state, have been, like the American Indians, family oriented and noncompetitive. Since the 1970s, however, they have become more nationalistic and militant, competing politically and economically with the more numerous and generally more successful Hawaiians of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Portuguese, and Black background. (5)

Black Americans

Black Americans, who continue to be an underclass, were aptly characterized as The American Dilemma. (6) They rose from slave status to become post-civil war citizens legally, but with lingering discrimination. Southern state laws prescribed "separate but (never) equal" facilities. Blacks moved north for jobs and security, spurred by World War I industrial growth and World War II defense needs. Here de facto segregation by neighborhood prevailed. They found themselves worse off in northern ghettos, unable to compete with blue collar whites. The law, ultimately, was on their side: the federal executive and federal courts stood for civil rights. School desegregation, mandated by the historic U.S. Supreme Court 1954 Brown decision, remains unfulfilled. The Black revolt, spurred by the 1955 Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott under Martin Luther King, Jr., brought some gains in the 1960s and 70s. But 1980s administration cutbacks, an economic downtown, and a faltering commitment to equality eroded these gains. Black unemployment in 1982 was 20.2%; whites, 9.3%. Black teenage unemployment was 46.7%; white teenagers, 21.7%. Black family median income is about half (56%) that of whites. (7) Blacks lag behind whites economically and educationally, as the following 1986 figures show: high school graduates, whites 83%, Blacks 72%, Hispanics 55%; entered college, whites 38%, Blacks 29%, Hispanics 22%; completed college, whites 23%, Blacks 12%, Hispanics 7%; entered graduate or professional school, whites 14%, Blacks 8%, Hispanics 4%. (8)

Hispanic Americans

Hispanics, a diverse group, increased from 9 to 14 million, 1970-80. They include Mexican Americans, fastest growing and largest (59.8%) of Hispanic groups. Mexican Americans increased by 93% (1970-80); Cuban Americans, by 45%; Puerto Ricans, 41%; Blacks, 18%; and whites as mentioned, 6%. Mexican Americans' rapid increase comes from a high birth rate and continued immigration from Mexico, legal and illegal. (9)

Living mainly in California and Texas, Mexican Americans have been exploited migrant farm laborers. Organized and militant in the 1960s, they fought for bilingual education and equal rights, still denied them. Mexican American median income (1979) was $15,200, compared with $9,900 for Puerto Ricans (lowest income of all Hispanics); $15,500 for other Hispanics; $12,618 for Blacks; and the U.S. average of $19,908. (10)

Puerto Ricans, second largest Hispanic group, numbered (1980) over two million on the mainland and 3.1 million in Puerto Rico. They are the youngest group of Hispanics: median age, 20.7, compared to 23.3 for other Hispanics and 30.1 for total U.S. "Airborne migration" has settled most Puerto Ricans in New York and New Jersey. Mainland Puerto Ricans' future is affected by the island's politics, economy, and social development. (11)

Cuban Americans are older (median age, 37.7 years), more affluent, and more conservative. Most fled the 1959 Castro revolution to settle mainly in Miami and New York City. Even professionals at first had difficulty reestablishing their careers. Lower income Black Cubans still cannot find jobs and equality. Cubans, who have generally adapted well to the U.S., have also evoked resentment for "Latinizing" Miami and Dade County, Florida, for demanding bilingualism, and for dividing Cubans into pro- and anti- Castro groups. (12)

Asian Americans

They have been called "The New Whiz Kids." Refugees or U.S. born, young Asian Americans as a group (but not all) are doing well in school and generally outperform their peers, both white and other ethnics. Not since the East European Jews arrived after 1880 has an ethnic group done so well. Since 1981, 20 Asian Americans have been among the 70 Westinghouse Science Talent Search winners. At the University of Washington, 20% of engineering students are Asian Americans; at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, 40%. In 1985 70% of Asian American 18-year-olds took the Scholastic Aptitude Test (in contrast to 28% of all 18-year-olds) and scored 43 points higher in math than the average. Many choose to excel in math and science because they feel there is less discrimination in these fields and because they promise higher wages. Asian Americans also excel in music, the arts, and other fields.

Why are Asian Americans such super achievers? "They work hard," said a Harvard psychologist. A Stanford sociologist found that because of parental expectations and encouragement Asian Americans spent 11 hours a week doing homework, compared with seven hours by other students.

UC Berkeley psychologist Arthur Jensen found that Asian Americans averaged 10 I.Q. points higher than whites. Other researchers, doubting Jensen's genetic superiority argument, attribute Asian American success to Confucian ideals that stress family values and education. The Confucian ethic, they say, rather than gentler Buddhism, drives people to work and to excel in order to repay parents. Others discount the genetic and Confucian explanations and say that high motivation is a reaction to bad memories of Asian racial stereotyping as Fu Manchu or Charlie Chan or laundry or restaurant owners.

Asian American academic success has bred resentment, led to some harassment in New York City schools and elsewhere, and evoked some college and university admission quotas. Some among this model minority do not do well. Many Vietnamese who immigrated to the U.S. after the 1975 fall of Saigon remain poor. Their war-scarred children, struggling with a new language and culture, are often school dropouts. Poorer Asian Americans feel rejected economically. In California about half of Indochinese immigrants are on welfare. In 1980 over 35% of Vietnamese families in the U.S. lived in poverty. A Chicago study found that as third generation Asian Americans blended into the mainstream, their academic performance declined and they became less interested in school.

Yet most Asian Americans do well. Said educational historian Diane Ravitch, "If you arrive with high aspirations and self discipline, schools are a path to upward mobility." Said another commentator on Asian American success, "We shouldn't be threatened, but challenged....Their presence is going to be a great blessing for society." (13)

Minorities in Selected Countries

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

The Russian empire, which grew ever larger by war and conquest, now covers one sixth of the earth, from Asia to Europe, and has over 100 different cultures and languages, some recorded only in this century. Each of the 15 union republics has distinct regional languages and cultures, with 22 "autonomous" republics within the 15 union republics. The largest union republic, the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), contains 53% of the USSR's total population (280 million), and includes 17% Ukrainians, 4% Belorussians, 2.5% Tatars, 1.34% Georgians, plus over 100 other minorities. Many Russians (Stalin, for instance, a Georgian) were raised in a local home language, studied in a regional language, and for success had to master the official Russian language and customs. USSR history has seen the forced "Russification" or attempted fusion of many minorities into the Russian (RSFSR) language and custom mold. Fluency in Russian, the language of higher education, is essential for socio-economic mobility and success. Russian Jews, for example, highly fluent in Russian, dominate higher education and science organizations, yet many want to leave for religious reasons and for freedom. The "Nationalities Problem" is the USSR's time bomb. A deep-seated, long-suppressed minority drive to exert individuality was let loose by Chairman Gorbachev's new "openness" (glasnost). Armenians (5.5 million) revolted in 1988 to express hostility to neighboring Muslims, to seek more minority rights, and to gain more educational and economic opportunities. Russians, who in 1988 still slightly outnumbered minority non-Russians, will by 2000 AD be outnumbered by minorities.

People's Republic of China

Most (94%) of China's over 1 billion population are of the Han (majority) nationality; 6% of the total population or 67.7 million (1983) consist of 55 ethnic groups. Most live in isolated areas near China's borders, where territorial clashes have occurred with neighbors (USSR, India, others). Mainly ignored before Communist control in 1949, minorities have since been fairly well treated. Intermarriage with the Han majority and mastery of the Chinese language are encouraged to hasten assimilation. Educational standards have risen for minorities, school enrollment has increased, textbooks are published in 17 minority languages, and the number of minority teachers has grown. Uprisings occurred among the Tibetan minority in 1959 and 1987-88. Tibetan Buddhist leader Dalai Lama, who fled during the 1959 uprising, has been invited to return as a religious leader only and forego minority religious politics. He has refused. A less known minority, the Hui Muslims, has also revolted because their mosque schools were closed and because their Arabic language was stopped in state schools.

England

Of England's total population of 60 million, 5% or 2.4 million are immigrants from India, Pakistan, Africa, and the Caribbean. They live mainly in London and other urban ghettos. With England's economic decline, racial tensions have risen: 1 in 4 minority persons experienced physical or verbal abuse in 1986. Minority children are the lowest school achievers. They are the last hired and the first fired. They earn only 85% as much as whites; 20% are jobless compared to 10% of whites. Seventy-five percent of white college graduates found jobs a year after receiving their degree, compared to fewer than 50% of minorities. Observers feel that minorities will suffer from the 1988 School Reform Act. The Act's provisions which favor whites and handicap minorities include: requiring a national curriculum, allowing schools to opt out of local control for central government control, and allowing parents to choose schools outside their neighborhoods. Unlike the U.S., England has not had an organized civil rights movement or civil rights monitoring agencies.

Israel

Tiny Israel, the size of New Jersey, has 4 milllion people. Its over 3 million Jews from all over the world are divided into two groups on the basis of geographic origin. The dominant Ashkenazic Jews (45% of the Jewish population), originally from Europe and North and South America, are urbanized, educated, cultured, and fair skinned. The 55% less advanced, darker skinned Sephardic Jews, originally from rural and less educated North African and Middle Eastern countries, are the minority, with less socio-economic-political status and lower educational attainment and motivation. Jews are also divided by the degree of their religious beliefs, as seen in their four types of schools: (1) 65% attend State Secular schools, with minimum religious content; (2) 25% attend State Religious schools, with more religious content; (3) 6.5% attend Ultra Orthodox schools, with strict religious content and observance; and (4) 3.5% attend communal Kibbutz schools and Army schools. All Jewish schools use the Hebrew language, with Arabic an optional but little studied subject.

Israeli Arabs (who live within Israel) consist of 446,000 Muslims, 84,000 Christians, and 46,000 Druzes--all attending Arab schools, separate from the four types of Jewish schools. They are mainly rural with poor facilities and fewer trained teachers. Arabic is the language of instruction. In nearby disputed territories live some 1.5 million Palestinian Arabs, mostly war refugees and largely unschooled. A 1976 study (little has changed since) showed the Israeli Arab minority's lower status: 24% of Jews attend university, compared to 8% of Arabs; 9% of Jews over age 14 are illiterate, as against 36.5% Arabs; 16% Jewish teachers are uncertified, as against 43% uncertified Arab teachers; 41% Jews hold white collar jobs, as against 14.5% Arabs; 96% Jews own refrigerators, 54% Arabs; 52% Jews have telephones, 7% Arabs. For security reasons Israeli Arabs cannot serve in the Israeli Army and are denied sensitive industrial jobs. They are understandably bitter and resentful. Some efforts are made to speed Sephardic Jews' advancement. Not enough is done to advance Israeli Arabs. Little is done for Arab refugees--in an atmosphere aggravated by Arab-Israeli conflict.

Conclusion

Why Internationalize Multicultural Education?

As the foregoing selected international ethnic descriptions show, minorities exist everywhere. Many suffer discrimination and limited rights as citizens. An international view shows that discrimination is not exclusively a U.S. problem but is a persistent worldwide phenomenon, meriting study, understanding, sympathy, and discussion by each student generation.

We enrich our understanding of U.S. ethnic groups when we compare them with other nations' ethnic groups and their problems. We learn more about ourselves when we see how our neighbors (other nations) have developed aspects of their national life, including treatment of ethnic minorities.

Cultural Differences Among Various Ethnic Groups

Educators must know about not only various ethnic experiences and life styles but also cultural differences. In traditional families, the patriarchal father may be threatened when his wife also becomes a breadwinner. Their children, often the only family link with the English-speaking world, gain unaccustomed and perhaps disturbing new status in the family. Customs vary: patting a Vietnamese child on the head, not done among the Vietnamese, may be upsetting because the head, housing the soul, is believed sacred. Asian male friends frequently hold hands, something Americans may ridicule. Praise, traditionally given in private, can be embarrassing in noncompetitive societies. Clearly, teachers intending to share multicultural insights with students need special courses and wide relevant reading. (14)

Today's Ethnics, Tomorrow's Leaders

Minorities around the world are those who, because they differ significantly from the dominant culture, experience ostracism, exploitation, suffering, struggle, and for some, ultimate achievement. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, intending to shock, addressed the ultrapatriotic and straitlaced Daughters of the American Revolution as "My fellow immigrants." America was a nation of have-nots whose children became the world's haves. Now, new immigrants and their children, who will eventually enrich our national culture and economy, arrive hopeful but uncertain and frightened. From them will come tomorrow's leaders: scientists, statesmen, professionals, and contributing citizens.

Multicultural education was given national recognition March 1988 when the Stanford University faculty voted to rename their required Western Civilization course "Cultures, Ideas and Values," substituting for previously used classics in Western philosophy and literature "works by women, minorities and persons of color." (15)

The Multicultural Education Teacher

The heart of the minority problem is majority prejudice and a reluctance to expend in one or two generations what is needed to bridge the gap and to repair previous generations' exploitation and neglect. Most minorities "make it" in the U.S. The multicultural teacher is a positive force for good, building bridges of understanding for a stronger America and a better world.

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